

Southern Region

Our Kids

2005 • Vol. 1

Many kinds of threads weave the Muehlfeld family fabric

The life that Art and Jannean Muehlfeld have with their four children includes two daughters through adoption, two sons from a previous marriage, several foster children who returned home and birth family grandparents. All of these threads woven together with love, perseverance and respect create a unique and beautiful family.

That had not always been the case. When Art and Jannean were married, Jannean was thrilled to become a new wife and a stepmother to two terrific boys, Eric and Greg. After some time together they wanted to expand their family. They considered many options and prayed for guidance. Their prayers were answered in the form of Dave Morris, a family friend who works for DCFS. He explained that there were kids in the area who needed foster care resources, and that sometimes the foster care placements led to adoptions.

The Muehlfelds decided this was the path to follow. The Muehlfelds began their fostering career with great expectations and were happy when children in their care were returned to their birth families. In 1999, two little girls named Marissa and Holly were placed in their home and it immedi-

ately felt like a perfect match. As time passed, there were some indications from the caseworkers that the girls would become available for adoption. The Muehlfelds loved these girls and were prepared to make a lifetime commitment to them. At that point, they had been together for more than



Art and Jannean Muehlfeld (center) have built a family that includes their daughters by adoption, sons by marriage, grandparents and birth family members

three years and all family members were strongly attached to each other.

Everything was building up momentum, and the stage was set to make 2002 an incredible year for memories. That summer the family took their first plane ride, traveling to Las Vegas. The stakes were unusually high. The Muehlfelds were taking Marissa and Holly to visit their grandparents and

older siblings. Their trip was a success since the Muehlfelds met new “friends” who would soon become family.

In November, the Muehlfelds moved into their dream home, allowing each child their own bedroom. They moved in the night before Thanksgiving and were overwhelmed by all they had to be thankful for.

Before 2002 was over the Muehlfelds were honored to adopt Marissa and Holly in December. The adoption was even more special because members of the extended family could also be present. The best Christmas gift of all was not one under the tree, but a happy family wrapped up in one another. Later, family and friends met at the Cornerstone Christian Church to celebrate the “new Muehlfelds.”

They’re not so new anymore, but they still work hard to build family connections. They now stay in contact with birth family through letters, pictures and occasional visits. But there is no place like home. The Muehlfelds claim a verse from a Dr. Seuss book called “My Nest is Best” as their family theme song. “I Love My House! I Love My Nest! In All the World, My Nest is Best.”

Foster parent sees impact of meth abuse and offers help

In more than 30 years of child welfare experience Larry Johnson, Director of Lutheran Social Services in Southern Illinois has never seen a drug problem escalate as quickly as methamphetamine or “meth.” As a result, the number of children coming into foster care has been rapidly growing in Southern Illinois.

In a seven-month period placements at his agency skyrocketed from about 90 children in care to 160. Those numbers became personal for an area foster parent now taking care of her sister’s two children after her arrest for operating a meth lab in their home.

Methamphetamine is a toxic combination of anhydrous ammonia, pseudoephedrine and lithium. Users are attracted to the drug because of its cheap availability and euphoric effects. Methamphetamine affects more than just the users - it affects the entire family unit.

“On February 13 my sister was busted for operating a meth lab in her home. Unfortunately, her two children were also present. At the time my family had strong suspicions that she was involved with meth due to her actions and appearance. We knew very little about the drug and its impact on users,” said the relative caregiver, who wishes to remain anonymous.

On the midnight drive to the DCFS office to pick up the kids, she began to realize how horrible it had to be for them. The entire family has learned more than they ever cared to know about meth, including its effects on

the user, the children, the families and the communities.

“As a new foster parent, and family member of a meth addict, I was overwhelmed. I had no training in foster care, didn’t know much about guardianship, court proceedings, the many medical procedures, or how to deal with the psychological problems,” said the aunt.

Fortunately, there was help at an upcoming meth awareness conference. The well-intentioned relative was asked to join a committee made up of southern Illinois service providers in law enforcement, medical and the human service fields. The group’s goal was to bring these agencies together to begin the process of implementing new strategies and developing protocols that will help communities deal with and combat the epidemic. The efforts centered on medical/environmental issues, criminal justice, children/family concerns and treatment.

Included in the mission was the creation of a coalition that would continue the process after the conference was over. The Southern Illinois Meth Awareness Coalition (SIMAC) will keep the momentum going.

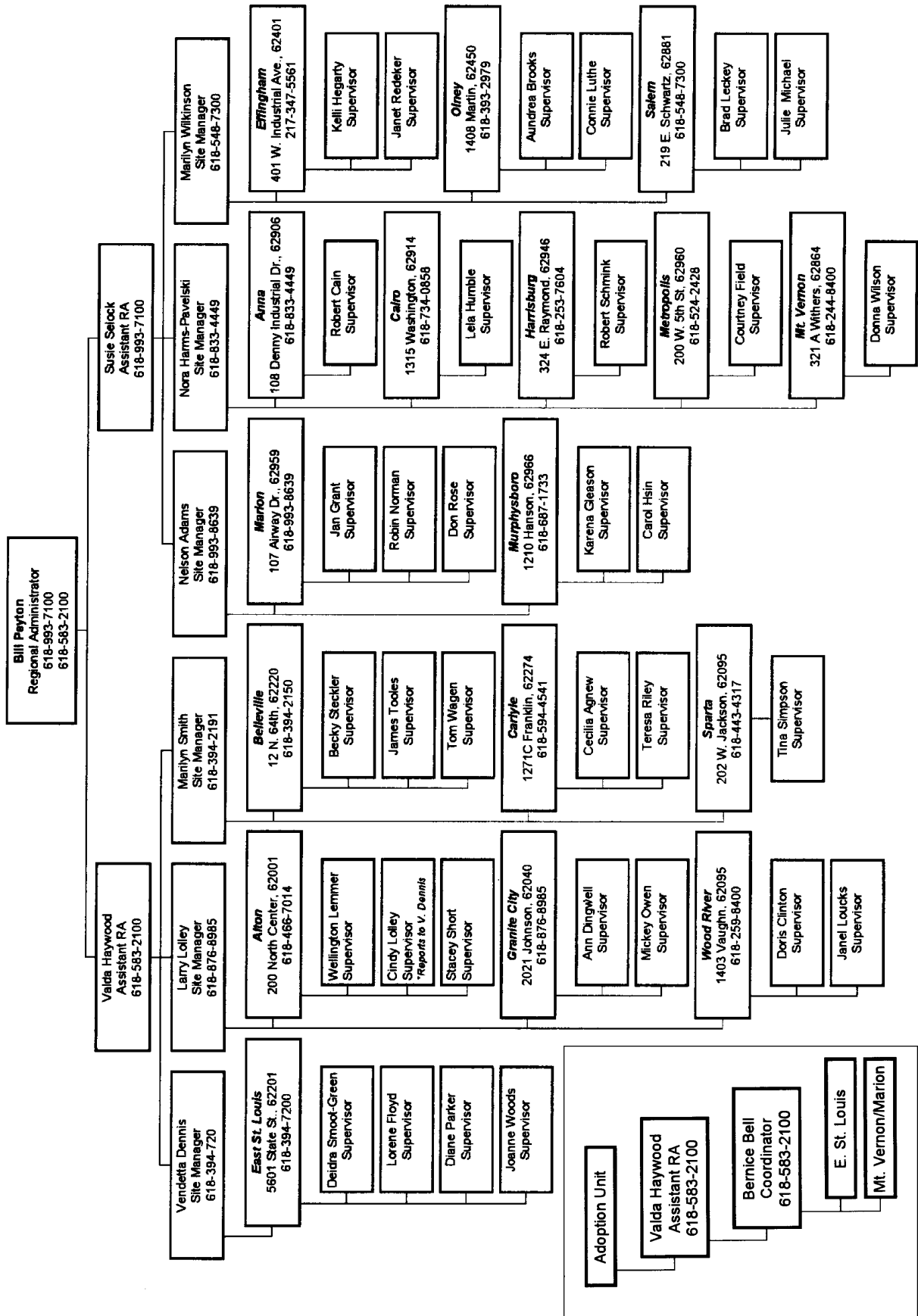
Four hundred and fifty people were trained at the conference held at John A. Logan College. The conference was very beneficial to the participants whose lives had been affected by meth. The coalition still has more work to do and more assistance to offer. For more information, contact Bill Blackman of the Illinois Coalition for Community Services at (618) 658-7500.

Meth labs endanger children

The Southern region is seeing an increase in youth entering foster care along with the rise in meth use and production. According to the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, at least 20 percent of the meth labs seized in 2004 had children present. Children can be harmed directly by coming into contact with the drug and also indirectly through accidents or violence connected with use of the drug.

- Because meth can be absorbed through the skin, young children can pick up the drug from touching surfaces or ingest it by putting their fingers in their mouths. Toxic chemicals get into clothes, food, utensils and floors, and they resist normal cleaning.
- Meth use can diminish the user’s appetite so that parents aren’t compelled to maintain food in the house, leading to neglect. They can also fall into “crash sleeps” that could last for days, leaving children unsupervised.
- Increased sex drive is a symptom of meth use, which can expose children to sexual activity or make them vulnerable to sexual abuse.
- According to the Office for Victims of Crime, 15 percent of meth labs were discovered as a result of a fire or explosion.
- Meth users can experience paranoid periods that have led parents to harm their children following meth-induced hallucinations.

Communication with our foster parents is of the utmost importance. The better we are able to work to communicate our needs and concerns, the better the team will work. If you have any questions about the handling of any case-related actions regarding a child in your home, please use the chain of command to guide your inquiries. Please feel free to voice appropriate concerns in a timely fashion. If you do not help address issues as they arise, it makes it harder for the whole system to be responsive to the needs of our children and foster parents. Thank you for being good partners.



Southern Region Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

- Module 1** - Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (four 3-hour sessions = 12 hours)
- Module 2** - Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture and Meet Developmental Needs (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)
- Module 3** - Module 3 was combined with Module 4
- Module 4** - The Sexual Development of Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)
- Module 5** - Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)
- Module 6** - Working As A Professional Team Member (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)
- Module 7** - Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identities (two 3-hour sessions = 6 hours)
- Module 8** - Promoting Permanency Outcomes (three 3-hour sessions = 9 hours)
- Module 9** - Managing the Fostering Experience (two 3-hour sessions = 6 hours)
- Module 10** - Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children and Families (five 3-hour sessions = 15 hours)

Educational Advocacy

(Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend this training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy is offered following each FosterPRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

EAST ST. LOUIS AREA

DCFS Fairview Heights Office
10251 Lincoln Trail, Ste. 3

April 5 & 12 (Tues)
6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

May 7 & 14 (Sat)
9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

June 8 & 15 (Wed)
6:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

MARION AREA

Carbondale Ramada Limited
801 N. Giant City Road

June 11 (Sat)
9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Please contact the college in your area for an updated schedule of in-service trainings.

**Marion area 618-536-7751
E. St. Louis area 618-650-3213**

**Regional V First Conference
March 31- April 3, 2005
"Building Bridges"
Kalamazoo, Michigan**

Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association is joining Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin for a conference designed for adoptive, foster and kinship families.

Contact Gladys Boyd at 773-720-0669 or Regina Boyd at 708-568-6263. Conference brochure is available at www.ofcaonline.org.

**National Foster Parent Association
"Back to the Future"
35th Annual Education Conference
Orange County, California
May 6 - 14, 2005
800-557-5238 or www.NFPAinc.org**

For more information or to coordinate transportation from Illinois, contact Gladys Boyd at 708-748-8670.

From the Lending Library

Surviving Your Adolescents-How to Manage and Let Go of Your 13-18 Year Olds

by Thomas W. Phelan

Most parents agree that living with a teenager is no picnic. There are times when you must bite your tongue as they push toward independence. Or, if you sense there is trouble, there are times when you must take charge. This book/audio cassette gives parents the skills in a step-by-step approach that will help them learn to manage teenage risk-taking, learn what is normal adolescent behavior and much more.
4 credit hours.

Consult your Lending Library Catalog to borrow, or contact the training program in your area for more information.